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Alfredo M. Bonanno
Anarchism and the National Liberation Struggle
Third South African Edition, February 2019
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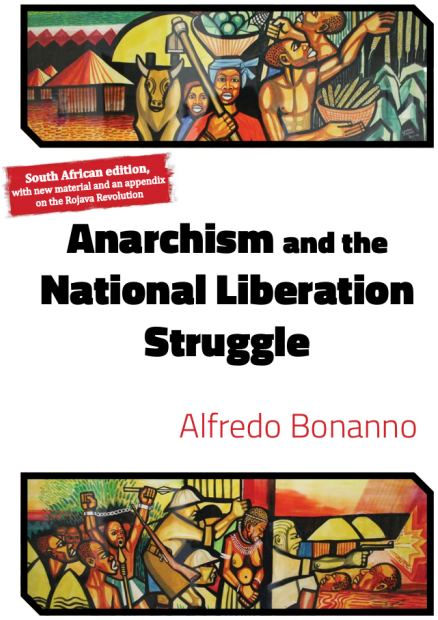
Anarchism and the National Liberation Struggle

Third South African Edition, February 2019

Alfredo M. Bonanno



2019

purposes, shows that it is not enough to have vague demands for "democracy." Without strong organisation and an emancipatory programme, based among ordinary people, little will be achieved – and much will be lost.

system to defend it against attacks by the Turkish state. The actual practice in Rojava though, where the system exists on a far larger scale, is quite contested, and while numerous councils and assemblies have been established, as part of a larger Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), some forces seek to use this to build a new state i.e. to transform structures like KCK into a traditional representative government.

While the diverging trends are united in fighting ISIS, it is not clear how long unity can last. The PKK is also not the only player: the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a de facto state in Iraq, run by the PUK and KDP, proposes a more orthodox nationalist road. Whether the PKK will retain a central role in the Kurdish national liberation struggle, and whether the model of "democratic confederalism" will sustain itself and move fully towards a social revolution – including in the economy – remains to be seen.

While US air strikes have helped halt ISIS, this does not mean the US, for example, favours the PKK, which it, like Turkey, declares a terrorist organisation. Interventions by regional and international powers remain a major threat. Another threat is posed by radical Islamism, a powerful radical right-wing current flourishing in the crisis [of] Arab nationalism. And the PKK's own history also poses challenges: its radical bottom-up approach should not detract from the reality that for much of its history it was a top-down paramilitary force.

The PKK, even in its new phase, is not an anarchist organisation: it is closer to Bookchin's model, which although derived from anarchism, also waters down some key parts of it. Nonetheless, anarchist ideas, via Bookchin and Öcalan, now form part of its ideological mix, a development of enormous international significance. It remains unclear though whether the council system the PKK favours will co-exist with, or replace, states, and it remains unclear how far it will be applied to the economy.

The "Arab Spring" has largely ended in winter. What the success of the PKK, in using a difficult situation for profoundly liberating

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vasion of Iraq led to the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region, while the crisis in Syria, including US actions from 2011, has seen the PKK playing a major role, alongside its local allies.

As ISIS has grown – in part through the Syrian civil war that started with the al-Assad regime's repression of the "Spring" protests, in part through US tolerance during the Iraq occupation – the PKK and its allies, including the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD, formed in 2003, affiliated to PKK) have proved to be the major force halting its atrocities and reactionary programme.

From the 1990s, the PKK increasingly abandoned Marxism-Leninism in favour of "democratic confederalism," associated with the late American revolutionary Murray Bookchin, which developed out of anarchist ideology. Whereas the PKK line was for a new state before the 1990s, the new line (according to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan) involves a scepticism about nationalist and Marxist-Leninist projects, and rather favours a "democratic system of a people without a State," that "takes its power from the people and adopts to reach self-sufficiency in every field including the economy."

That is, while they have remained anti-capitalist, anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, the PKK and groups affiliated to it, no longer wish to set up a state, seen as a system of elite rule. In areas influenced by the PKK in parts of Turkey and in Rojava, a system influenced by "democratic confederalism has been established. Federated communes, assemblies and councils that use direct democracy and recallable delegates (i.e. a sort of upside-down pyramid, in place of state hierarchy and centralisation) has been put in place in many areas. In some instances, co-operatives have been formed, as an economic system consistent with the bottom-up ethos. Also notable: the system is multi-ethnic, non-racial and does not practice religious discrimination, favouring instead basic liberties.

Thus in parts of Turkey, Kurdish people have tried to put "democratic confederalism" into practice and they have used a militia

as well as three empires collapse, including the Ottoman, the remnant of which became Turkey. While some subject peoples secured independence, others – among them, the Kurds – were transferred to new imperial masters, which drew new borders, including the borders of what became Iraq and Syria. The existence of independent Turkey and Iran, and the decolonisation of Iraq (1932) and Syria (1936) did not solve the Kurdish national question: instead, the Kurds remain an oppressed minority [split across four states].

Nationalist ideas came to play an increasing role among the Kurds from the 1920s, some nationalists seeking complete independence, others greater autonomy. Policies like discrimination, restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language, forced removals and state-sponsored resettlement of other groups into "Kurdistan" continually generated struggle. Various parties emerged in the different states from the 1940s onwards, like the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP, formed 1946) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

In the 1960s the radical left came to play a major role, and placed the struggle against feudal notables amongst the Kurds themselves on the agenda. Marxist insurgencies took place in Iran as well as within Turkey from 1978 by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The PKK has also undertaken actions in Iraq and Syria and is closely linked to the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran. Its anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal politics were far more radical than the KDP and PUK.

Complicating matters have been continual efforts by regional and global powers to use Kurdish struggles for their own agendas (as when Iranian and Syrian agencies have used Kurdish struggles against their rivals Iraq and Turkey), and violent conflicts between Kurdish groups, like that between the PUK and KDP in Iraq in the 1990s.

Ironically the destabilisation of the Middle East, both due to imperialist actions and attempts to repress the "Arab Spring", have given an impetus to the Kurdish struggle. The 2003 American in-

"The anarchist programme concerning the national liberation struggle is very clear: it must not go towards constituting an 'intermediate stage' towards the social revolution through the formation of new national States. Anarchists refuse to participate in national liberation fronts; they participate in class fronts which may or may not be involved in national liberation struggles. The struggle must spread to establish economic, political and social structures in the liberated territories based on federalist and libertarian principles."

Alfredo Bonanno,

1978.

This important pamphlet attempts to develop an anarchist internationalist position on the ever present reality of national liberation struggles and the national question. Wide ranging in the topics it covers – from internal colonialism to a critique of certain Marxist views – the pamphlet argues that anarchists should support national liberation struggles insofar as they are waged by and for the oppressed classes, and that the national question can only be resolved by the free association of peoples on a libertarian and federalist basis.

Humanity will never be free until we liberate ourselves by global social revolution

Third South African Edition, February 2019

Indeed, left-wing ideas like anarchism, and, Marxism-Leninism, have a lengthy history among the Kurds, of which developments in Rojava are one part. National liberation struggles have historically taken many forms. Evidently, nationalism – the doctrine that the whole "nation" must unite across class divisions, to secure a nation-state that can express the "national" will – has played a key role. But nationalism is only one of a number of possible responses to national oppression, and it has only sometimes achieved dominance.

Systems generating national oppression, such as imperialism and colonialism, have, historically, evoked responses ranging from collaboration, to liberalism, to religious millenarianism, to radical right-wing currents, to left movements like Marxism and anarchism/syndicalism. Conflating national liberation with nationalism misses this complexity, and the far more radical roads that have sometimes opened up.

This crucial distinction – between national liberation struggles, and nationalism – is essential to understanding the evolution of the Kurdish national liberation movement, and the challenges it faces. This movement is deeply fractured by different approaches, each proposing very different solutions. One of its most striking features has been the influence of the left: Marxism-Leninism from the 1960s, and, more recently, ideas derived in part from anarchism/syndicalism.

A distinct Kurdish nationality dates back many centuries. National oppression was not unique to Western or capitalist or nominally Christian empires. The feudal Ottoman Empire, dating back to the 1200s, the last major nominally Muslim empire straddling Africa, Asia and Europe, included many subject peoples and religions: many, including the Kurds, had major grievances.

In the 1800s, successful national liberation struggles and conflicts with rival empires were breaking up the Empire. Increasingly harsh policies against rebellious nationalities marked its last years. The First World War (1914–1918) saw a number of monarchies fall,

Appendix: The Kurdish Question: Nationhood or Autonomy

by Shawn Hattingh and Lucien van der Walt

Taking a look at the existential crisis of the Kurdish in Turkey and elsewhere [this article looks at the limits and possibilities of national liberation struggle. It shows how the current Kurdish struggle in Rojava is assuming revolutionary features influenced partly by anarchism, and its inspiring fight against oppressive forces — including the extreme right ISIS movement. It also looks at some of the limits of what is taking place. In closing the article argues that the revolutionary outcomes in Rojava, as opposed to the limits and failures of much of the "Arab Spring," shows that strong organisation and an emancipatory programme, based among ordinary people is essential — not vague demands for "democracy."]

The Kurds are a nationality concentrated in a territory that straddles four states: Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. For months Kurdish militia have been fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) in Kobane on the Syrian and Turkish borders and have been subjected to ongoing attacks by the Turkish state.

The Kobane (part of Rojava in Northern Syria) conflict is one episode in the longer struggle by the Kurdish national liberation struggle. It is also increasingly associated with a revolutionary reconstruction of society in the region of Rojava, influenced in some ways by anarchism, that is, the tradition of Bakunin and Kropotkin.

Introductions

Introduction to the 1994 South African Edition (Revised)

by Lucien van der Walt

This pamphlet represents an attempt to develop an anarchist internationalist stance on the ever present and ever controversial issue of the national liberation struggle (NLS), and, more broadly, the "national question" itself. We can broadly understand the NLS to mean a struggle against a relationship of exploitation and domination involving a NATIONAL group. Such a struggle is of obvious importance to us as anarchists, because we are opposed to all oppression, and believe that it must be ended by revolutionary action.

The topics covered by Bonanno range from internal colonialism, imperialism, class identity, to incisive critiques of certain Marxist positions on this issue. However, two main arguments are made in this text. Firstly, he argues that only revolution, based on libertarian and federalist structures, can make possible the free association of human groups, thereby solving the national question.

Secondly, and far more importantly for our purposes, Bonanno makes the case that *anarchists should fully support national liberation struggles (i.e. against imperialism and internal colonialism) insofar as they are the struggles of the oppressed classes (workers and peasants) themselves.* This is because different classes within the oppressed nation have different interests and therefore also end goals within the NLS. That of the national aspirant capitalist-cum-politician class is to exploit and dominate their compatriots. This is obviously no solution at all for the oppressed classes.

years some yearning after a past long buried under ruins: and it is this which enables the romantic to look so deeply within.

With so-called "national consciousness" this home sentiment has no relationship; although both are often thrown into the same pot and, after the manner of counterfeiters, given out as of the same value. In fact, true home sentiment is destroyed at its birth by "national consciousness", which always strives to regulate and force into a prescribed form every impression man receives from the inexhaustible variety of the homeland. This is the unavoidable result of those mechanical efforts at unification which are in reality only the aspirations of the nationalistic states.

The attempt to replace man's natural attachment to the home by a dutiful love of the state – a structure which owes its creation to all sorts of accidents and in which, with brutal force, elements have been welded together that have no necessary connection – is one of the most grotesque phenomena of our time. The so-called "national consciousness" is nothing but a belief propagated by considerations of political power which have replaced the religious fanaticism of past centuries and have today come to be the greatest obstacle to cultural development. The love of home has nothing in common with the veneration of an abstract patriotic concept. Love of home knows no "will to power"; it is free from that hollow and dangerous attitude of superiority to the neighbour which is one of the strongest characteristics of every kind of nationalism. Love of home does not engage in practical politics nor does it seek in any way to support the state. It is purely an inner feeling as freely manifested as man's enjoyment of nature, of which home is a part. When thus viewed, the home feeling compares with the governmentally ordered love of the nation as does a natural growth with an artificial substitute.

fictitious unity sprung only from a wish-concept; and its advocates would like to tune all members of a definite human group to one note in order to distinguish it from other groups still more obviously. In this respect, so-called "cultural nationalism" does not differ at all from political nationalism, for whose political purposes as a rule it serves as a fig-leaf. The two cannot be spiritually separated; they merely represent two different aspects of the same endeavour.

Cultural nationalism appears in its purest form when people are subjected to a foreign rule, and for this reason cannot pursue their own plans for political power. In this event, "national thought" prefers to busy itself with the culture-building activities of the people and tries to keep the national consciousness alive by recollections of vanished glory and past greatness. Such comparisons between a past which has already become legend and a slavish present make the people doubly sensitive to the injustice suffered; for nothing affects the spirit of man more powerfully than tradition. But if such groups of people succeed sooner or later in shaking off the foreign yoke and themselves appear as a national power, then the cultural phase of their effort steps only too definitely into the background, giving place to the sober reality of their political objectives. In the recent history of the various national organisms in Europe created after the war are found telling witnesses for this.

In culture-nationalism, as a rule, two distinct sentiments merge, which really have nothing in common: for home sentiment is not patriotism, is not love of the state, not love which has its roots in the abstract idea of the nation. It needs no laboured explanation to prove that the spot of land on which man has spent the years of his youth is deeply inter-grown with his profoundest feeling. The impressions of childhood and early youth which are the most permanent and have the most lasting effect upon his soul. Home is, so to speak, man's outer garment; he is most intimately acquainted with its every fold and seam. This home sentiment brings in later

What Bonanno is pointing to is that NLS can assume a variety of forms: ranging from revolutionary class struggle against oppression, aiming at the institution of an anarchist society, to a nationalist (class alliance) form, typically concerned with forming a national state. This may be the division of an existing state into several new ones (as in Czechoslovakia), or the reshaping of an old state into a new form (as in South Africa), but whatever the form of the new state its function is that of all states: to serve ruling class interests.

As it stands, the pamphlet has only one real problem. Although Bonanno repeatedly refers to "exploitation", no mention whatsoever is to be found of "domination". Yet as anarchists, we are not merely opposed to "exploitation" but [unequal – *editor*] power relations themselves. It is precisely this that distinguishes us from other socialists, and it is precisely for this reason that we favour federalist and libertarian forms of organisation.

But the pamphlet is still clearly highly relevant to South Africa. Firstly, Black people have long been engaged in what might be conceptualised as a national liberation struggle against post–colonial white settlerism or "colonialism of a special type" (i.e. South Africa, although independent, retains within itself the features of White colonialism). Secondly, since the end of the Second World War at least, nationalism has the primary form taken by resistance to Apartheid–Capitalism (see O'Meara in M.T. Murray (editor) *South African Capitalism and Black Political Opposition*, esp. pp. 389 – 392). Nationalism is exemplified in the politics of the African National Congress (ANC), Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and even the South African Communist Party (SACP); the SACP believes that a "national democratic revolution" must be achieved before class revolution can take place. (Previously, Black nationalism was largely confined to Black intellectuals and petty businessmen).

And finally the importance of a class perspective on national struggle and nationalism is increasingly obvious as the country moves, by means of the "reform" period, into a situation where

the majority of Black people are left out of the "new South Africa", whilst at the same time a small elite of Black mangers, politicians, businessmen, professionals, and skilled, often unionised Black (male) workers are absorbed into the barely changed structures of State and capital i.e. the White ruling class (see Morris, February 1993, in *Work in Progress*, no.87, pp. 6 – 9). This is a clear case of class interests and divisions shattering the "nation". It might be worth noting that the White nation is also fracturing in class lines as the White upper classes withdraw from White workers the privileges (e.g. job reservation, high wages) that used to buy the acquiescence of the latter…

What follows is an attempt to extend Bonanno's analysis to the problems of building a revolutionary anarchist movement. Theoretical clarity is an essential part of this task (see *Bratach Dubh Preface* in this pamphlet). So let us examine the relationship between nationalism and class carefully.

We must recognise two factors. Firstly, as anarchists we must recognise that national oppression (like racism, sexism etc.) means that specific sections or fractions within the oppressed classes are *doubly oppressed*: both because of their class position and as a nationality. Three points follow. First, this means that *within* the oppressed classes (which are multi-national) certain groups are subject to relations of [national – *editor*] oppression. Second, because national oppression has its own independent reality (from class oppression etc.) and is obviously not confined to any one class, it (like other non-class oppressions e.g. race etc.) can and does provide the basis for cross class alliances class (which are not in the long term interests of all [oppressed – *editor*] classes). Third, it means that the unity of the oppressed classes cannot be assumed: that they may be easily and deeply divided.

Secondly we must not be blind to the fact that nationalism really *does* give people in the oppressed classes something. "This 'something' is identity, pride, a feeling of community and solidarity and of course physical self-defence" in the face of very real oppres-

for political power, just as nationalism has never been anything but the political religion of the modern state. Belonging to a nation is never determined, as is belonging to a people, by profound and natural causes; it is always subject to political considerations and based on those reasons of state behind which the interests of privileged minorities always hide. A small group of diplomats who are simply the business representatives of privileged caste and class decide quite arbitrarily the national membership of certain men, who are not even asked for their consent, but must submit to this exercise of power because they cannot help themselves.

Peoples and groups of peoples existed long before the state put in its appearance. Today, also, they exist and develop without the assistance of the state. They are only hindered in their natural development when some external power interferes by violence with their life and forces it into patterns which it has not known before. The nation is, then, unthinkable without the state. It is welded to that for weal or woe and owes its being solely to its presence. Consequently, the essential nature of the nation will always escape us if we attempt to separate it from the state and endow it with a life of its own which it has never possessed. A people is always a community with rather narrow boundaries. But a nation, as a rule, encompasses a whole array of different peoples and groups of peoples who have by more or less violent means been pressed into the frame of a common state. In fact, in all of Europe there is no state which does not consist of a group of different peoples who were originally of different descent and speech and were forced together into one nation solely by dynastic, economic and political interests.

ALL nationalism is reactionary in its nature, for it strives to enforce on the separate parts of the great human family a definite character according to a preconceived idea. In this respect, too, it shows the inter-relationship of nationalistic ideology with the creed of every revealed religion. Nationalism creates artificial separations and partitions within that organic unity which finds its expression in the genus Man, while at the same time it strives for a

Appendix: Rudolf Rocker on Nationalism & Culture

The old opinion which ascribes the creation of the nationalist state to the awakened national consciousness of the people is but a fairy tale, very serviceable to the supporters of the idea of the national state, but false, none the less. The nation is not the cause, but the result of the state. It is the state which creates the nation, not the nation the state. Indeed, from this point of view there exists between people and nation the same distinction as between society and the state.

Every social unit is a natural foundation which, on the basis of common needs and mutual agreement, is built organically from below upwards to guarantee and protect the general interest. Even when social institutions gradually ossify or become rudimentary the purpose of their origin can in most instances be clearly recognised. Every state organisation, however, is an artificial mechanism imposed on men from above by some ruler, and it never pursues any other ends but to defend and make secure the interests of privileged minorities in society.

A people is the natural result of social union, a mutual association of men brought about by a certain similarity of external conditions of living, a common language, and special characteristics due to climate and geographic environment. In this manner arise certain common traits, alive in every member of the union, and forming a most important part of its social existence. This inner relationship can as little be artificially bred as artificially destroyed. The nation, on the other hand, is the artificial result of the struggle

sion (Class War, *Unfinished Business*, pp. 50, 156 – 7). And nationalism (called "ethnicity") can provide a very effective principle of organising for sectional gains and material benefits for members of all classes involved (see N. Chazan *et. al., Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, Chapter 3; also Nelson Kasfir, in Kohli (editor), *State and Development in the Third World*). In South Africa, Afrikaner nationalism was not only supported by White Afrikaner farmers, traders, professionals, and financiers, but also by White workers because it successfully addressed their poverty, oppression as Afrikaners (most semi- and unskilled Whites were Afrikaners) and very real fears of Black competition in the job market etc. (see L. Callinicos, 1993, *A Place in the City*, pp. 110 – 131, esp. pp. 120 – 123).

So, how do these points bear on anarchism? If we are to forge an effective and successful movement, we must, firstly recognise that the movement must be based on the oppressed classes. But we must recognise and challenge oppression within the class by specific and systematic work across all working class organisations (e.g. actively fighting racist attitudes), and by championing demands and struggles that unite the workers and the poor against the oppression that all share (e.g. low wages) and that also specifically fight the extra oppression that some face (e.g. fighting racist pay gaps, discriminatory housing and services etc.). We need to link a range of popular organisations into a broader revolutionary mass movement – a revolutionary front of the oppressed classes, that fights all oppression, but steers clear of cross-class alliances with elites – involving "many different groups and individuals… They will have different experiences and approaches and each will be good at different things" but will communicate and co-operate with one another (Class War, *Unfinished Business*, pp. 135–6). Federalist structures are ideally suited to this task.

At the same time we must strive to unite the oppressed classes, (guarding against the selfish manipulation of division by the bosses and the ambitious), to fight in their own class interests i.e. for the

overthrow of the ruling class. Thirdly, we must combat the solidarity etc., given by nationalism with *class* identity, pride, community, solidarity, history, culture and achievements (Class War, *Unfinished Business*, pp. 50).

Finally, our role as revolutionaries. Our aim is to build a revolutionary and libertarian worker-peasant movement, (based on the oppressed classes, BUT recognising oppression and struggle within the class), which will strive to increase the militancy of struggles, to build a culture of revolution, and to build a situation of counter power, of peoples power.

In this way we can make the revolution‼!

Forward to a society based on direct democracy, not power, and need not greed‼!

universal justice above all national interests. And we should once and for all time abandon the false principle of nationality, invented of late by the despots of France, Russia and Prussia for the purpose of crushing the sovereign principle of liberty. Nationality is not a principle: it is a legitimate fact, just as individuality is. Every nationality, great or small, has the incontestable right to be itself, to live according to its own nature. This right is simply the corollary of the general principle of freedom.

Nationality and Universal Solidarity. There is nothing more absurd and at the same time more harmful, more deadly for the people than to uphold the fictitious principle of nationality as the ideal of all the people's aspirations. Nationality is not a universal human principle: it is a historic, local fact which, like all real and harmless facts, has the right to claim general acceptance. Every people and the smallest folk-unit has its own character, its own specific mode of existence, its own way of speaking, feeling, thinking, and acting; and it is this idiosyncrasy that constitutes the essence of nationality, which is the result of the whole historic life and the sum total of the living conditions of that people.

Every people, like every person, is involuntarily that which it is and therefore has a right to be itself. Therein consists the so-called national rights. But if a certain people or person exists in fact in a determinate form, it does not follow that it or he has a right to uphold nationality in one case and individuality in the other as specific principles, and that they have to keep on forever fussing over them. On the contrary, the less they think of themselves and the more they become imbued with universal human values, the more vitalised they become, the more charged with meaning nationality becomes in one instance, and individuality in the other.

The Historic Responsibility of Every Nation. The dignity of every nation, like that of every individual, should consist mainly in each accepting full responsibility for its acts, without seeking to shift it to others. Are they not very foolish, all these lamentations of a big boy complaining with tears in his eyes that someone has corrupted him, and put him on the evil path? And what is unbecoming in the case of a boy is certainly out of place in the case of a nation, whose very feeling of self-respect should preclude any attempts to shift the blame for its own mistakes upon others.

Patriotism and Universal Justice. Every one of us should rise above the narrow, petty patriotism to which one's own country is the centre of the world, and which deems itself great in so far as it makes itself feared by its neighbours. We should place human,

Introduction to the Second South African Edition (2003)

by Lucien van der Walt

The ongoing struggle in Palestine is only the most obvious of a number of national liberation struggles taking place worldwide. In northern Ireland, in the Basque country in Spain, in the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Turkey, in Kosovo, large popular movements for national liberation exist.

For revolutionary anarchists, such movements are of more than mere intellectual interest. The aim of revolutionary anarchism is to create, through a social revolution, a world based on social and economic equality and self-management of the workplace and the community.

Therefore, no anarchist revolutionary can turn a blind eye to the question of the national liberation struggle. National liberation struggles are a social struggle against domination, a struggle founded on the demand of oppressed nationalities against discrimination and persecution, and for equality and self-determination.

What is National Liberation?

In short, these struggles are struggles against the domination of one people by another. They are struggles centred on questions of equal language and cultural rights and recognition of local cultures. They are struggles for political and social equality. They are struggles for equal access to resources, to welfare, to jobs, all jobs, to land. Above all, they are struggles which address concerns specific

to an oppressed nationality, and they are struggles which centre on a particular territory, fought by the distinct and oppressed nationality which lives in that territory under conditions of oppression and domination. As national liberation struggles grow and gather strength, they became mass movements, drawing in people from across the class and social spectrum in the oppressed nationality.

To take one example. The Palestinian people have been fighting since the 1940s for a return to lands taken by the Israeli state, for a removal of Israeli army forces from Palestinian areas, for equal wages and access to jobs with Israelis, for free political activity and the right to choose their own destiny, and not to exist as slaves, as subalterns, as subordinates, to the Israeli's. And this struggle has drawn in a great many people from the working class and peasantry.

Because we oppose national oppression, because national liberation struggles draw in millions of working class and poor people, millions of peasant farmers, because we cannot stand silently by whilst blood is spilt in struggles for equality, we cannot stand aside.

Mikhail Bakunin, the great anarchist revolutionary of the 1860s and 1870s, a lifelong advocate of the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities declared "strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression," for every people "has the right to be itself… no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its languages and its laws." It was "shameful," Bakunin added, to ignore national liberation struggles, for it meant, in practice, siding with States and empires that practice imperialism or national oppression.

How do we relate to National Liberation Struggles?

The question, however, is HOW the revolutionary anarchist movement relates to national liberation movements. Much con-

Appendix: Bakunin on the National Question

The State is not the Fatherland, it is the abstraction, the metaphysical, mystical, political, juridical fiction of the Fatherland. The common people of all countries deeply love their fatherland; but that is a natural, real love. The patriotism of the people is not just an idea, it is a fact; but political patriotism, love of the State, is not the faithful expression of that fact: it is an expression distorted by means of a false abstraction, always for the benefit of an exploiting minority.

Fatherland and nationality are, like individuality, each a natural and social fact, physiological and historical at the same time; neither of them is a principle. Only that can be called a human principle which is universal and common to all men; and nationality separates men, therefore it is not a principle. What is a principle is the respect which everyone should have for natural facts, real or social. Nationality, like individuality, is one of those facts. Therefore we should respect it. To violate it is to commit a crime, and, to speak the language of Mazzini, it becomes a sacred principle each time it is menaced and violated. And that is why I feel myself always sincerely the patriot of all oppressed fatherlands.

The Essence of Nationality. A fatherland represents the incontestable and sacred right of every man, of every human group, association, commune, region, and nation to live, to feel, to think, to want, and to act in its own way, and this manner of living and feeling is always the incontestable result of a long historic development.

Appendices

fusion arises on this issue. And it is here that this important pamphlet by our comrade Alfredo Bonanno, who today languishes in an Italian jail for his revolutionary activities, is invaluable, an indispensable guide.

Two false approaches

There are two mistaken views on the national liberation struggle that exist in sections of the anarchist movement. The first is a left-wing view; the second, rather more right-wing.

Some anarchist comrades take the left-wing view. They have argued that anarchism is internationalist, because it aims at an international revolution, an entirely new world. Therefore, these comrades argue, we cannot confine our attention to the Irish Catholics, or the Basques, or the Kurds, or the Palestinians. Some have even argued that taking sides in national liberation struggles will divide the working class and peasantry. These issues, they say, are best ignored; they do not "really" matter anyway. What is important is the class struggle.

The left-wing view has some good points. It underlines the anarchist commitment to internationalism. It points to the importance of the class struggle.

Where this view is mistaken is when it assumes, when it claims, that internationalism and the class struggle stand in contradiction to national liberation struggles. A real internationalism, a living internationalism is one that stands in concrete solidarity with the working class and peasantry the world over. And what does this mean, if not solidarity with the working class and peasantry of oppressed nationalities in their struggles for national liberation?

It is equally mistaken to see national questions as separate to the class struggle. The class struggle is the struggle of ordinary people to take control of their lives, to resist exploitation and domina-

tion. The class struggle necessarily, therefore, encompasses struggles against national oppression.

The right-wing view in the anarchist movement on the issue of national liberation is one that holds that anarchists should uncritically support national liberation struggles. In practice, this means that comrades remain absolutely silent about the problems with some of the groups involved in these struggles. For many of these comrades, any current in the national liberation struggle that seems "militant" or calls itself "revolutionary" should be given a blank cheque of anarchist support.

These comrades, in short, refuse to engage politically with national liberation movements, and excuse this by saying it would be "oppressive" to do so.

The great mistake of the right-wing approach is its refusal to recognise that national liberation struggles are complex and contradictory: like the trade union movement, the national liberation struggles are made up of many different and contradictory political currents, some progressive, some reactionary.

Class Struggle and National Liberation

Sometimes these different political currents even exist in the same organisations. On the one side, there are progressive currents that fight for the working class and peasantry, that struggle to expand the realm of freedom, that struggle for a better life through direct action. On the other side, there are reactionary currents that love capitalism, hate democracy, love dictatorship, hate trade unions, and love only the most reactionary aspects of the oppressed nationality's culture: the elements that hate free thought, hate women, hate human rights.

Precisely because national oppression affects everyone in an oppressed nationality, the class struggle takes place WITHIN national liberation struggles. The oppressed working class and peasantry

others. The masonic and illuminist ideology could bolster the Jacobinism hidden within the Leninist version of Marxism, but has nothing to do with anarchism, despite the fact that many comrades continue to amuse themselves with abstract schemes and out-dated theories.

Anarchists should give all their support, concrete regarding participation, theoretical concerning analyses and study, to national liberation struggles. This should be begun from the autonomous organisation of the workers, with a clear vision of class counterpositions, that is putting the local bourgeoisie in their correct class dimension, and prepare the federalist construction of the future society which should rise from the social revolution. On this basis, which leaves no room for determinisms and idealisms of various species, any fascist instrumentalisation of the oppressed people's aspirations can easily be fought. It is necessary though that in the first place we become clear among ourselves, looking forward and building the correct analyses for an anarchist revolutionary strategy.

cannot fit into the Marxist typology; nevertheless they do their utmost to complicate matters by attempting to thus explain events which would otherwise be easily explicable. Interpolating more open models of reasoning, we should be able to identify relevant factors such as precisely the national and cultural or ethnic particularities. These enter into a wider process of exploitation and determine quantitative changes rendering possible exploitation itself and, in the last analysis, cause the emergence of other changes, this time of a qualitative nature. Peoples and classes, political and cultural formations, ideological movements and the concrete struggle, all undergo interpretative changes in relation to the basic model. If a mechanistic determinism is accepted, the consequences are the inevitable dictatorship of the proletariat, the passage towards a not easily understood and historically non-documentable progressive elimination of the State: on the contrary, if the interpretative model is open and indeterministic, if individual will comes to be included in a process of reciprocal influence with class consciousness, if the various socio-cultural entities are analysed not only economically but also more widely (socially) the consequences would be very different: preconceived statist ideas would give way to the possibility of a horizontal libertarian construction, a federalist project of production and distribution.

Certainly all this requires not only the negation of a mechanistic materialism which, in our opinion, is the result of Marxism, but also a certain idealism which, still in our opinion, comes to infect a part of anarchism. In the same way, universalism intended as an absolute value is ahistorical and idealised, because such illuministic postulating is nothing other than the inverted ideal of reformed Christianity. It is not possible to see clearly behind the Western hegemony how much of it was developed by the ideology of a false freedom, an ambiguous humanitarianism with a cosmopolitan basis. The myth of the white man's domination is represented in various forms as the myth of civilisation and science, and therefore as the foundation of the political hegemony of a few States over

fight for national liberation as part of the broader struggle for freedom and equality. The oppressed middle class and capitalist class struggle only to establish their own rule: they hate the capitalists of the oppressing nationality for limiting their scope to exploit "their own" people. These two different sets of classes, the masses and the elite, share no fundamental interests or aims; even the culture of the nationality takes radically different forms for the masses, and for the elite.

Nationalism versus National Liberation

What these reactionary currents all share is the ideology of nationalism: the ideology that maintains that class struggle is irrelevant, that oppressed workers and peasants must join hands with their "own" exploiters and aspirant exploiters, to establish a national capitalism and national State. Their aim is "national independence," meaning that "local" capitalists will replace "foreign" capitalists, "local" generals the "foreign" generals, "local" government officials the "foreign" officials.

Nationalism is a reactionary current in the national liberation struggle, a reactionary current that simply cannot deliver any meaningful freedom for the working class and peasantry of the oppressed nationality. Nationalism is a reactionary current that sacrifices the masses on the altar of the elite.

As Bakunin said, national liberation must be achieved "as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses." If the struggle is taken over by "ambitious intent to set up a powerful State" and "carried out without the people," it will become hijacked by the "privileged class" and degenerate into a "retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement."

The ANC in South Africa is a perfect example. Established in 1912 by the African middle class, the ANC has always aimed at nothing more than the expansion of the African capitalist class.

Whenever the African working class has sought to transform the ANC into a vehicle for its own specific demands, as it managed to do, to some extent, with the UDF, the trade union, and the civic struggles of the 1980s, the ANC leadership has fought back to silence and sideline the demands of the working class.

The ANC leadership has used the trade unions to pursue its sectional, and elitist agenda. The results are perfectly clear: the ANC leadership has betrayed every one of the demands of the African working class and contracted an unholy marriage with the big mine-owners, factory bosses and farmers. It implements the neo-liberal GEAR policy that has led to millions of job losses, to millions of evictions and cut-offs, to a wave of subcontracting and casualisation, breaking every promise it made to African working class people in 1994. Yet it still calls on African workers to vote for it.

There can be no common ground with such reactionary currents.

Social Revolution or National "Independence"?

The role of anarchists in national liberation struggles is clear.

Anarchists support struggles against national oppression, just as anarchists support struggles against the oppression of women, just as anarchists oppose capitalist wars. Anarchists support struggles for more political and economic and social rights: even small victories are important because they increase the scope for working class and peasant self-activity, and because they inspire further, and greater struggles. And anarchists support the dismantling of empires and of dictatorial States.

Anarchists even defend the right of oppressed nationalities to establish their own States if they wish. We do not agree that this is the correct approach, but people have the right to mistakes with-

Conclusion

Many problems have been raised in this work, with the awareness that they have only been done so in part, due to their wide complexity. We began from a situation of fact: that of Sicily, and a process of dismembering capable of causing incalculable damage in the near future. We have said how this process sees, in our opinion, a union of fascists and mafia, and how the interests which these people want to protect are substantially those of the Americans. The circulation of certain stale separatist formulae has obliged us to take as clear as possible a position, and seek to single out the essential points of anarchist internationalism in the face of the problem of the national liberation struggle. We have also given a brief panoramic sketch of a few of the interpretive defects latent in the orthodox Marxist view of the problem and a few strategic obtusities which in practice determine the no small difficulties which the Marxist-inspired national liberation movements find themselves. We shall now try to conclude our research with a few indications of theoretical interest.

We must thoroughly re-examine the problem of the relationship between structure and superstructure. Many comrades remain within the Marxist model and do not realise it, so much this has penetrated our "current" way of seeing things. The power which the Marxists now hold in our universities allows them to propose a certain analytical model to the intellectual minorities, selling it off as reality with their usual complacency. In particular, it is the conception of "means of production" which must be put to careful analysis, showing the limitations and consequences of the deterministic use of the economic factor. Today economic reality has changed and

> sentiment, from the bourgeoisie that the vanguard of the proletariat must take up this question of the right of the nation to autonomy, which is the most courageous and sincere position. The workers will defend totally and without reserve, the right of the Catalans and Basques to live as independent States in the case of the majority opting for a complete separation, which does not mean to say at all that the working elite must push the Catalans and Basques on to the road of separatism. On the contrary, the economic unity of the country, with great autonomy for nationalities, would offer the workers and peasants great advantages from the economic point of view and from that of culture in general."

It is clear to see that the counter-position is the most radical possible. Marxists and Trotskyists follow systems of reasoning which for us have nothing to do with the free decision of the exploited minorities to determine the conditions of their own freedom. It is not the case to take up the fundamental theoretical differences, but it is enough to re-read Trotsky's passage to realise the theoretical ambiguities it contains, and how much space is given to a political strategy favourable to the establishment of a dictatorship by an "illuminated" minority, and how little would be done towards the "real" freedom of the exploited. The ambiguous use of the term separatism should be underlined, and the insistence upon irrational arguments such as those relative to the "national sentiment".

out being locked in jail, without being shot down, without being butchered in the streets.

We do not, therefore, ignore national liberation struggles, but see these as an important site of struggle for the working class and peasantry. However, our real aim is revolution, always revolution. Our main struggle is class struggle, always class struggle. And our aim is international change, always international. The key issue is the struggle for social and economic equality, and the struggle for self-management.

Therefore, our aim is to win national liberation movements to the struggle for social revolution, not the fraud of "political independence." It is capitalism and the State which create national oppression. No one country can be "free" in a capitalist world.

For the people of Palestine, freedom from Israel will not mean freedom from external domination, for an "independent" Palestinian state will still be dominated by larger States and giant corporations from outside its borders, economically, politically, culturally. It will inevitably be, at best, a junior partner of powerful forces from outside, and will not therefore truly be independent.

And the "independent" State will inevitably be the tool of Palestinian capitalists, who will prove no more generous to their own working class and peasantry than the Israelis were. National oppression itself may disappear, in that the Israeli tanks and laws will be withdrawn, but exploitation, poverty and class rule will remain. And the new State will itself practice national oppression against its own internal national minorities.

What else does South Africa after 1994 show but that the country remains dominated from outside by the United States and by the multi-nationals, by the World Bank and by the World Trade Organisation, while the African majority of the working class languishes in the hell of poverty and the jail of unemployment whilst the African capitalist class gorges itself at the trough with its close friends, big White business?

Participation for Transformation

From this basis, it is simply not good enough to write blank cheques to any and every current that exists in actual national liberation struggles, and to exist as nothing other than charity organisations, operating on the sidelines as fundraisers for any and every current that manifests in a national liberation struggle.

Instead, anarchists must PARTICIPATE in national liberation struggles, and reshape them into revolutionary movements. We participate on the side of the oppressed classes, and we fight the domination of nationalism.

As Bonanno says here, anarchists "refuse to participate in national liberation fronts" that try to submerge the struggles of the working class and peasantry for the malignant purposes of local elites. Instead, anarchists "participate in class fronts which may or may not be involved in national liberation struggles." Sometimes this will mean allying on a temporary basis with currents who do not agree with us, sometimes even with nationalists, on specific issues and campaign, but we remain politically independent – always. And we fight for anarchism – always.

The aim is to foster the class struggle, to develop it in the direction of self-management and revolution, to defend the independence of the working class and peasantry, to develop a social RUPTURE with nationalism, with capitalism and the State, AND with the local elites. In practice, this means anarchists must participate in the more progressive currents in the national liberation struggle to transform them in a revolutionary direction. No blank cheques here: rather, a political struggle to promote class struggle, combat nationalism, and foster social revolution.

The "anarchist project concerning the national liberation struggle is very clear: it must not go towards constituting an 'intermediate stage' towards the social revolution through the formation of new national States." Instead, writes Bonanno, "The struggle must spread to establish economic, political and social structures in the

> which is rising to a period of radical transformation in the whole of Europe."

In fact, the Marxist movements for national liberation, when ruled by a minority who eventually transform themselves into a party (a generalised situation at the present time), end up using strategic distinctions, leaving the essential problems – which in point of fact also influence strategy – in second place.

The Marxists do not, for example, go into the difference between the imperialism of large States and the nationalism of small ones, often using the term nationalism in both cases. This causes great confusion. The nationalism of the small States is often seen as 'something which contains a positive nucleus, an internal revolt of a social character, but the detailed class distinction is usually limited to the strictly necessary, according to strategic perspectives. It is often maintained, unconsciously following in this the great maestro Trotsky, that if on the one hand the upsurge of the people and oppressed minorities is immutable, the working class vanguard must never try to accelerate this thrust, but limit themselves to following the impulses while remaining outside.

This is what Trotsky wrote in January 1931:

> "The separatist trends in the Spanish revolution raise the democratic problem of the right of a nationality to self-determination. These tendencies, seen superficially, have worsened during the dictatorship. But while the separatism of the Catalan bourgeoisie is nothing but a means for them to play the Madrid government against the Catalan and Spanish people, the separatism of the workers and peasants is just the covering of a deeper revolt of a social nature. We must make a strong distinction between these two types of separatism. Nevertheless, it is precisely to distinguish the workers and peasants oppressed in their national

> take bloody revenge upon the Slavs for this vile and scandalous betrayal.

There can be no doubt about these radical counter-positions. Marx and Engels remain tied to a determinist view of history which is intended to be materialist, but which is not free from certain Hegelian premises, lessening the possibility of an analytical method. Moreover, they, especially Marx, let fly on strategic evaluations which reveal an emphasis on liberal-patriotism which, if it was justifiable in 1849, was a lot less so in 1855. Nevertheless at this time, during the Crimean war, he writes:

> "The great peninsula south of the Sava and the Danube, this marvellous country, has the misfortune of being inhabited by a conglomeration of races and nationalities which are very different, and one cannot say which would be the best suited for progress and civilisation. Slavs, Greeks, Rumanians, Albanians, almost 12 million in all, are dominated by a million Turks. To this day one might ask if of all these races, the Turks were not the most qualified to have the hegemony which can evidently be exercised over this mixed population by one nation."

And again in 1879, in the course of the Russian-Turkish war, which today the communists call "the Bulgarian patriots' war of liberation", Marx wrote,

> "We definitely support the Turks, and that for two reasons. The first is that we have studied the Turkish peasants, that is, the Turkish popular masses, and we are convinced that they are one of the most representative, hard-working and morally healthy of the European peasants. The second is that the defeat of the Russians will accelerate considerably the social revolution

liberated territories, based on federalist and libertarian organisations."

A New World

And as part of this struggle, anarchists aim to promote alliances and unity with working classes and peasantries in other nationalities, in other countries, in ALL other nationalities and countries, including those of the oppressing nation. The anarchists aim at uniting class struggle internationally.

This means striving, without sacrificing the struggle for national liberation, to UNITE Palestinian and Israeli workers and peasants, Catholic and Protestant workers in Ireland, Kurdish workers and peasants with their Turkish and Iraqi class brothers and sisters. All working class people and peasants share a common interest in improving their economic and social conditions, in extending their political rights, in ending capitalism, in abolishing the State.

Our approach to the national liberation struggle, therefore, is part of a broader struggle for an extension of freedom for all. We do not promote ethnic and racial conflict, we struggle for the general extension of rights and freedoms and self-management. We struggle for universal principles, and we will not shy away from criticising the political currents, and cultural practices that contradict those principles. We support only what is progressive, democratic and socialist in a given culture: nothing more, nothing less.

For real autonomy and self-determination can only take place in a free world, in a world where there are no States, corporations, multi-national or otherwise, no World Banks, no World Trade Organisations.

The new world will recognise and celebrate cultural identity. The new world will allocate international resources equitably to remove poverty and under-development. The new world will unite

all nationalities in a single world federation, without sacrificing cultural difference and distinction.

In such a world, based on libertarian communism, national oppression will disappear, social and economic equality will be real, and humankind will be united as never before, with the great and oppressed masses oppressed no more, but now, and forever, the architects of human destiny.

Marx-Engels: In the pan-Slav manifesto we have found nothing but these more or less moral categories: justice, humanity, freedom, equality, fraternity, independence, which sound good, but which can do nothing in the political and historical field. We repeat, not one Slav people – apart from the Poles the Russians and perhaps the Turkish Slavs – has a future for the simple reason that all the other Slavs lack the most elementary historical, geographical, political and industrial bases. Independence and vitality fail them. The conquerors of the various Slav nations have the advantage of energy and vitality.

Bakunin: The liberation and federation of the Slavs is only the prelude to the union of the European republics.

Marx-Engels: It is impossible to unite all peoples under a republican flag with love and universal fraternity. It is in the bloody struggle of a revolutionary war that unification will be forged.

Bakunin: Certainly, in the social revolution, the West, and especially the Latin peoples, will precede the Russians; but it will nevertheless be the Slav masses who will make the first revolutionary move and will guarantee the results.

Marx-Engels: We reply that the hatred of the Russians and the first revolutionary passion of the Germans, and now the hatred of the Czechs and the Croates are beginning to intersect. The revolution can only be saved by putting into effect a decisive terror against the Slav peoples who for their perspective of their miserable “national independence”, have sold out democracy and the revolution. Some day we shall

Bakunin: The Poles, enslaved by three states, must belong to a community on an equal basis along with their present dominators: the Germans, the Austrians, the Hungarians and the Russians.

Marx-Engels: The Germans' conquest of the Slav regions between Elba and the Warthe was a geographical and strategical necessity resulting from the divisions in the Carlovingian Empire. The reason is clear. The result cannot be questioned. This conquest was in the interest of civilisation, there can be no doubt about it.

Bakunin: The Southern Slavs, enslaved by a foreign minority, must be freed.

Marx-Engels: It is of vital necessity for the Germans and the Hungarians to cut themselves out of the Adriatic. Geographical and commercial considerations must come before anything else. It is perhaps a pity that magnificent California has recently been snatched from the inept Mexicans who do not know what to do with it? The "independence" of a few Spaniards in California and Texas might possibly suffer. "Justice" and other moral principles are perhaps denied in all that. But what can be done in the face of so many other events of this kind in universal history?

Bakunin: So long a one single persecuted nation exists, the final and complete triumph of democracy will not be possible anywhere. The oppression of a people or a single individual, is the oppression of all, and it is not possible to violate the liberty of one without violating the liberty of all.

Introduction to the 1976 Bratach Dubh Edition

by Jean Weir

Anarchists have tended to shy away from the problem of the national liberation struggle or rejected it entirely because of their internationalist principles.

If internationalism is not to be merely meaningless rhetoric, it must imply solidarity between the proletariat of different countries or nations. This is a concrete term. When there is a revolution, it will be as it has been in the past, in a precise geographical area. How much it remains there will be directly linked to the extent of that internationalism, both in terms of solidarity and of the spreading of the revolution itself.

The 'patriotism' of the people at a basic, unadulterated level is the struggle for their own autonomy, a natural urge, a 'product of the life of a social group united by bonds of genuine solidarity and not yet enfeebled by reflection or by the effect of economic and political interests as well as religious abstractions'. (Bakunin) Just as the State is an anti-human construction, so is nationalism a concept designed to transcend and thwart the class struggle which exists wherever capitalism does (all over the world). If the efforts of the people who are living in the social and economic ferment of what is happening under the name of national liberation are left to their leaders, they risk finding themselves no better off than before, living in micro-corporate States under whatever flag is chosen for them. Anti-imperialism can mask local corporatism if the struggle is not put in class terms at a micro- as well as macroscopic level.

As the following article demonstrates, many of the Marxist groups engaged in national liberation struggles are none too clear on this point.

Alfredo Bonanno's article was written in response to a real situation, that of Italy, and in particular, Sicily. At the present time in that country, where economic and political disintegration is rife, the weakest link (Sicily) is being subjected to propaganda and actions directed towards creating a state of tension in order to lay the shaky foundations for a separatist solution. This solution, a separate Sicilian State, is being proposed by the forces of the right, i.e. the fascists, who have formed a tenuous working alliance with the Mafia, who together are the willing servants of US interests through the intermediary of the CIA. Each party has its own interests to establish and protect: the Mafia would gain access to political contacts and facilities for financial transactions, the Americans would keep their hold on an economy which is at present seeking solutions from the Communist Party, and maintain a strategic base in the Mediterranean, and the fascists, once in power, would gain credibility, enabling them to extend this power towards the North.

Needless to say the Sicilian proletariat would pay the price for this solution to the country's problems, in the same way as up until now they have paid in sweat and blood for the development of the North, as well as supplied cheap labour to the German and Swiss economies. This situation cannot be discarded as irrelevant to revolutionaries simply because when it reaches the international eye it will be masked as a nationalist struggle. The basic truth of Sicilian reality is a super-exploited proletariat whose only solution can be sought through armed struggle for workers' autonomy through a federal or collectivist system of production of exchange.

To come nearer home, two situations immediately present themselves: the first, Ireland, which tends to be left aside as being too complicated, or unconditionally supported as an anti-imperialist war. This anti-imperialism needs to be clarified. That the Irish proletariat will never run their own lives while British soldiers are oc-

which resulted in his being quite unjustly accused of pan-Slavism. Marx and Engels replied with a sour criticism in their paper Neue Rheinischer Zeiting. Let us now see this hypothetical dialogue as it is suggested by Balanski.

> **Bakunin:** The Slav peoples who are enslaved under Austria, Hungary and Turkey, must reconquer their freedom and unite with Russia, free from Czarism, in a Slav federation.
>
> **Marx-Engels:** All these small, powerless and stunted nations basically owe recognition to those who, according to historical necessity, attach them to some great empire, thereby allowing them to participate in a historical development which, had they been left to themselves would have remained quite foreign to them. Clearly such a result cannot be reached without treading upon some sensitive areas. Without violence nothing can be achieved in history.
>
> **Bakunin:** We must allow in particular for the liberation of the Czechs, the Slovaks and the Moravians, and their reunification in one single entity.
>
> **Marx-Engels:** The Czechs, among whom we must include the Moravians and the Slovaks, have never had a history. After Charlemagne, Bohemia was amalgamated with Germany. For a while the Czech nation emancipated themselves to form the Great Moravian Empire. Consequently, Bohemia and Moravia were definitively attached to Germany and the Slovak regions remained to Hungary. And this inexistent 'nation' from a historical point of view is demanding independence? It is inadmissible to grant independence to the Czechs because then East Germany would seem like a small loaf gnawed away by rat.

Marxists and the National Liberation Struggle

If we can share the class analysis made by some Marxists groups such as that elaborated by a part of the E.T.A. which we published in no. 3 of Anarchismo, what we cannot accept is the fundamental hypothesis of the formation of a workers' State based on the dictatorship of the proletariat, more or less along the lines of the preceding political State according to the organisational capacity of the individual national liberation organisations. For example, the E.T.A. comrades are fighting for a free Basque country, but are not very interested in a free Catalonia or a free Andalusia. Here we come back to the doubts so well expressed by Nido which we quoted above. At the basis of many Marxist analyses there lurks an irrational nationalism which is never very clear.

Going back to the Marxist classics and their polemic with Bakunin, we are able to reconstruct a kind of dialogue between the two, glancing at a similar piece of work done by the Bulgarian comrade Balkanski.

In 1948, immediately after the Slav congress where he had unsuccessfully developed the idea of a Slav federation to re-unite a free Russia and all the Slav peoples to serve as a first nucleus for a future European federation and then a greater universal federation of peoples, Bakunin took part in the insurrection of Prague. Following the Prague events, Bakunin, hunted by the police, took refuge in Berlin and established close contacts with a few Czech students with the aim of attempting an insurrection in Bohemia. At this time, (the beginning of 1849), he published Appeal to the Slavs

cupying their land is a fact. But an internal dominator, whether Republican or otherwise, with its own army or State apparatus, would be no less an obstacle. That the seeds of revolution that have always been identified with national independence exist in Ireland is a fact, but this fact is constantly being distorted by those with an interest in using racial and religious differences to their own ends. Only through revolutionary economic and social change, through the autonomous actions of the Irish exploited as a whole, supported by the exploited of Britain and the rest of the world, will ethnic differences be re-dimensioned and superstructural fantasies be destroyed. Counter-information must be brought out in opposition to the media which have thrived on stirring up hatred around irrational issues. The economic foundations of these irrational issues should be laid bare to the world, and economic solutions worked for through direct action to put production, distribution and defence in the hands of the people themselves.

In Scotland big business has found new roots, and the nationalist argument is proving to be effective in getting workers to sacrifice themselves for the false goal of 'building the national economy' and 'curbing inflation', through 'independence from Whitehall'. Multinational interests can thrive on smaller centralised interdependent States, rather than through the old concept of the powerful nation. At a social level, there are always personal (economic and status) interests to be gained: for example, revival of language often means the possibility of a new local elite involved in the media, education and so on.

At the same time, it is easy to understand why the exploited in deliberately underdeveloped Scotland look at the centres of British capitalism and interpret their misery through a nationalist optic. The revolutionary work of unmasking irrational nationalism should not disdain the basic struggle for identity and self-management or divert it into a passive waiting for an abstract world revolution.

Anarchists must therefore work to show up the void of national self-determination, and disrupt the corporate plans of parties, trades unions and bosses by identifying the real struggle for self-appropriation and contributing to it in a concrete way. Along the road to generalised insurrection, techniques of sabotage and defence must be in the hands of those directly involved, eliminating dependence on outside groups and their ideologies, in order for them to take over production and distribution and run their own areas on the basis of free federalism, collectivism, or both. Starting on this self-managed basis in a logic where the 'transitional phase' finds no place, the perspective of a wider federation of free people becomes a foreseeable reality.

All this requires study and work, both at a practical and theoretical level. We hope that this pamphlet will be a small contribution towards this end.

Glasgow, June 1976

> carry the struggle to its conclusion: the destruction of capitalism in its present state. The decisive struggle to be carried out must be a world-wide class struggle of exploited against exploiters, beginning from a struggle without frontiers, with precise tactics against the nearest bourgeoisie, especially if they proclaim themselves "nationalist". This class struggle is moreover the only way of saving and stimulating the "ethnic specification" on which it would be possible to build stateless socialism."

The anarchist programme concerning the national liberation struggle is therefore clear: it must not go towards constituting an "intermediate stage" towards the social revolution through the formation of new national States. Anarchists refuse to participate in national liberation fronts; they participate in class fronts which may or may not be involved in national liberation struggles. The struggle must spread to establish economic, political and social structures in the liberated territories, based on federalist and libertarian organisations.

Revolutionary Marxists who, for reasons we cannot analyse here, monopolise the various situations where national liberation struggles are in course, cannot always reply with such clarity to the perspective of a radical contestation of State centralisation. Their myth of the withering away of the bourgeois State and their pretention of using it creates an insurmountable problem.

> omy, etc. This would be a superficial analysis, and not take account of global reality. The enemy to be defeated by the Irish, the Bretons, the Provençal's, for example, is not England and France, but the whole of the bourgeoisie whether English, Breton, Provençal or American. In this way the ties which unite the regional bourgeoisie with the national and world bourgeoisie can be understood."

In this way national liberation goes beyond simple internal decolonisation and attacks the real situation of imperialist capitalist development, putting the objective of the destruction of the political State into a revolutionary dimension.

Ethnic limits also become easily recognisable. The ethnic limit in the revolutionary process of free federations of production and distribution associations has its counterpart in the pre-revolutionary phase within a class dimension. The ethnic base of today consists of the whole of the exploited people who live in a given territory of a given nation, there being no common ethnic base between exploiter and exploited. It is logical that this class basis will be destroyed along with the destruction of the political State, where the ethnic limit will no longer coincide with the exploited living within a given territory, but with the whole of the men and women living in that territory who have chosen to live their lives freely.

On this problem the comrades of Fronte Libertaire continue:

> "Ethnic culture is not that of all who are born or who live in the same territory and speak the same language. It is the culture of those who, in a given group, suffer the same exploitation. Ethnic culture is class culture, and for this reason is revolutionary culture. Even if the class consciousness of the workers corresponds to a working class in a situation of national dependence, it is nevertheless the class consciousness which will

Anarchism and the National Liberation Struggle (1976)

by Alfredo Bonanno

Anarchism is internationalist, its struggle does not confine itself to one region or area in the world, but extends everywhere alongside the proletariat who are struggling for their own liberation. This requires a declaration of principles which are not abstract and vague, but concrete and well-defined. We are not interested in a universal humanism which finds origin and justification in the French bourgeois revolution of 1789. The declaration of the rights of man, a banner waved by all the democratic governments in power today, deals with an abstract man who is identified with the bourgeois ideal.

We have often argued against a certain idealist anarchism which speaks of universal revolution, acts of faith, illuminism, and in substance rejects the struggle of the proletariat and is anti-popular. This anarchism becomes an individual and mythological humanitarianism with no precise social or economic content. The whole planet comes to be seen as a biological unit and discussions end in a sterile adjournment to the determining power of the superiority of the anarchist ideal over all other ideals.

We think on the contrary that man is a historical being, who is born into and lives in a precise historical situation. This places him in certain relationships with economic, social, linguistic and ethnic, etc., structures, with important consequences in the field of science, philosophical reflection and concrete action. The problem of nationality is born from this historical direction and cannot be eliminated from it without totally confusing the very foundation of anarchist federalism.

As Bakunin wrote:

> "Every people, however small they are, possess their own character, their own particular way of living, speaking, feeling, thinking and working, and this character, its specific mode of existence, is precisely the basis of their nationality. It is the result of the

An objection to this could be that the State discriminates in this way between two bourgeois groups: the industrialists of the North and the landowners of the South, but to understand this we must bear in mind the different possibilities of exploitation between a highly developed and an underdeveloped area. In the South a 12–14 hour day was normal while the eight hour day had already been gained in the North. It is in this way that, thanks to the various advantages of a still mediaeval conception of society, the Southern landowners continued to extract surplus value without much reinvestment.

Thus the development of the North was guaranteed through the exploitation and enslavement of the South. The political rule of the North dictated this direction. which then took the course of capitalist production in general. Integration into the Italian capitalist system produced a disintegration of the Sicilian economy which in many aspects is of a pre-capitalist type. The law of the market obliged the most backward regions to integrate with the basic capitalist system: this is the phenomenon of colonisation, which comes about in foreign regions or nations, as well as in the internal regions of single capitalist States.

The next stage in capitalist development is the leap over the national frontier which has been weakened by the polarisation of the surrounding economies at the peaks of exchange monopolisation. Colonisation gives way to imperialism.

Here is what the comrades of Front Libertaire wrote on the question:

> "National liberation movements must bear this reality in mind and not stop at a pre-imperialist analysis which would lead to a regional third-worldism. That would mean that their revolutionary struggle would remain within the dialectic of coloniser-colonised, while ends to be attained would only be political independence, national sovereignty, regional auton-

liberation is taking on increasingly in today's world, a practical relevance of great importance.

The process of decolonization has intensified within many imperialist structures since the last war, urgently raising the problem of a socialist and internationalist interpretation of the national liberation struggle. The drama of the Palestinian people, the struggles in Ireland, the Basque countries, Africa, and Latin America, are continually posing the problem with a violence hitherto unknown.

Different economic forms within the same country determine a situation of colonisation, guaranteeing the process of centralisation. In other words, the persistence of capitalist production requires inequalities in the rate of development in order to continue. Mandel writes on this subject, "The inequality in the rate of development between different sectors and different firms is the cause of capitalist expansion. This explains how widened reproduction can continue until it reaches the exclusion of every non-capitalist means. Surplus value is thus realised by means of an increase in the concentration of capital". Mandel also treats unequal development between the various areas of one political State. The basic principle of capitalism is that although it can assure partial equilibrium, it can never assure total equilibrium, that is to say, it is incapable of industrialising systematically and harmoniously the whole of a vast territory. In other words, regional colonisation is not a consequence of centralisation, but is on the contrary one of the preconditions of capitalist development. Naturally, economic centralisation goes with political centralisation, and any allusions to democratic centralism are merely demagogic formulae, used at certain historical moments. Even superficially examining the facts of industrial and agricultural production from the unification of Italy to the end of the 1960's, one can clearly see what tasks the State has assigned to the South: to supply capital (especially emigrants' returns, taxes, etc.), supply a cheap labour force (emigration to the North), and supply agricultural products in exchange for industrial ones on the basis of the relationship of colonial exchange.

> whole of the historical life and all the conditions of that people's environment, a purely natural and spontaneous phenomenon."

The basis of anarchist federalism is the organisation of production and the distribution of goods, as opposed to the political administration of people. In fact, once the revolution is underway and production and distribution comes to be handled in a collectivist or communist way (or in various ways according to needs and possibilities), the federal structure with its natural limits would render the preceding political structure incongruous. It would be equally absurd to imagine such a wide limit as one extending over the whole of the planet. If there will be a revolution at all it will be an incomplete one, and this must materialise in space. Territorial limits will then not necessarily coincide with the political confines of the preceding State which has been destroyed by the revolution. In this case the ethnic division would take the place of the deforming political one. The cohesive elements of the ethnic dimension are precisely those which help to identify nationality and which have been so clearly expressed by Bakunin in the passage quoted above.

Anarchists refuse the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat or the management of the proletariat by a revolutionary minority using the ex-bourgeois State. They implicitly refuse the political dimension of the existing bourgeois State from the very moment in which the revolution begins. We cannot accept the "use" of the State apparatus in a revolutionary sense, therefore the provisional limit to be given to the freely associated structures remains the ethnic one. It is in this sense that Kropotkin saw the federation of free peoples, based on the approximate and incomplete example of the mediaeval communes as a solution to the social problem.

But this argument, it must be clear, has nothing to do with separatism. The essential point of the argument we are making here is that there is no difference between exploiters, that the fact of being

born in a certain place has no influence on class divisions. The enemy is he who exploits, organising production and distribution in a capitalist dimension, even if this exploiter then calls us compatriot, party comrade, or whatever other pleasing epithet. Class division is still based on exploitation put into effect by capital with all the economic, social, cultural, religious, etc., means at its disposal, and the ethnic basis which we identified as the limits of the revolutionary federation have nothing to do with this. Unity with the internal exploiters is impossible, because no unity is possible between the class of workers and the class of exploiters.

In this sense Rocker writes:

> "We are anational. We demand the right of the free decision of each commune, each region, each people; precisely for this reason we reject the absurd idea of a unitarian national State. We are federalists, that is, partisans of a federation of free human groupings, which do not separate themselves one from the other, but which, on the contrary, associate with the best of intimate ties, through natural, moral and economic relations. The unity to which we aspire is a cultural unity, a unity which goes forward on the most varied foundations, based on freedom and capable of repelling every deterministic mechanism of reciprocal relations. For this reason we reject every particularism and every separatism under which is hidden certain individual interests … for here we have an ideology where it is possible to discern the sordid interests of capitalist groups."

There remains to this day, even among anarchists when confronting the problem of nationality, a living residual of idealistic reasoning.

Not without reason, the anarchist Nido wrote in 1925,

> "The dismembering of a country is not considered a desirable ideal by many revolutionaries. How many Spanish comrades would approve of the historical disappearance of Spain and its reorganisation on a regional basis constituted of ethnic Castilian, Basque, Galician, and Catalan, etc. groups? Would the revolutionaries in Germany resign themselves to a dismembering similar to a libertarian type of organisation which based itself on the historical groups of Bavaria, Baden, Westphalia, Hannover, etc.? On the other hand, these comrades would quite possibly like to see a dismembering of the present British Empire, and a free and independent reorganisation of its colonies in Great Britain (Scotland, Ireland, Wales) and overseas, which would not be pleasing to the English revolutionaries! Such are men, and in this way, in the course of the last war (the 1st World War), we saw the co-existence of the concept of nationality in a historical sense, alongside the revolutionary claims of the anarchists". (Obviously referring to Kropotkin and the Manifesto of the Sixteen.)

Nido refers to a state of mind which has not changed much. Even today, either due to a persistence of the illuminist and masonic ideals within a certain part of the anarchist movement, or due to a mental laziness which turns many comrades from the most burning problems and pushes them to less troubled waters, the reactions in the face of the problem of nationality are not very different to those described by Nido.

In itself the problem would not concern us much, if it was not that it has a very precise historical outlet, and that the lack of clarity has extremely negative effects on many of the real struggles in the course of development. In substance, the problem of nationality remains at a theoretical level, while that of the struggle for national